

New marketing campaign highlights opportunities in downtown Dover for small business owners

Dover is unlocking the potential of its historic downtown with a new marketing campaign highlighting opportunities for small business owners ready to take their business dreams to the next level.

State and local officials led by Gov. John Carney; Linda Parkowski, acting director of the [Delaware Division of Small Business](#) and Dover Mayor Robin Christiansen today unveiled the “Unlock the Block” campaign, an effort to fill vacant commercial spaces in downtown Dover.

The “Unlock the Block” initiative assists landlords in finding tenants for those desirable spaces and directs property owners to incentives available for redeveloping their properties.

The initiative focuses on commercial properties along Lookerman Street and adjacent streets.

Tenants will be selected through a pitch competition judged by local experts. Those selected for the program will receive a combination of incentives and assistance, including fee waivers, free business consulting services, technical assistance and cash incentives.

“Unlock the Block” could become a model other Delaware cities and towns use to reduce commercial vacancies in their downtowns, Gov. John Carney said.

“Delaware’s small cities and towns offer an exceptional quality of life and an authentic experience to those who live,

work or shop there. They are one of the reasons tourists choose to come to Delaware,” Gov. Carney said. “Small business is a crucial part of Delaware’s economy. Some 96 percent of businesses in the state have 50 employees or fewer, so an initiative like ‘Unlock the Block’ is key to keeping our downtowns filled with strong small businesses that make those downtowns the kind of place people want to live and visit.”

“Unlock the Block” is the result of a partnership among several organizations – the Downtown Dover Partnership, City of Dover, Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce, Kent Economic Partnership, First State Community Loan Fund, NCALL and the Division of Small Business (Downtown Delaware).

“‘Unlock the Block’ is a prime example of a partnership between the Division of Small Business and nonprofits, local government and other stakeholders that helps create an environment across Delaware where businesses of all kinds and sizes can prosper, from the high-tech companies at the University of Delaware’s STAR campus to the destination shops and restaurants filling Delaware’s increasingly vibrant downtowns,” Parkowski said.

A centerpiece of the marketing campaign is a [video produced by downtown Dover-based Big River Film Co.](#) showcasing several businesses also in the downtown that already have found success.

Following the kick-off event, Gov. Carney and other officials visited the available commercial properties and toured several downtown businesses including House of Coffi, The Moving Experience real estate office, Petite Sweets, a bakery that makes cake pops, and The Loocke, a women’s apparel shop, whose owner also owns Bel Boutique, also in downtown Dover.

“Downtown Dover has a lot to offer anyone who is considering starting or expanding a business. From financial incentives to accessible government officials, we are a big enough to be a

city but small enough to be a hometown.” Dover Mayor Robin Christiansen said. “Through the city of Dover, Kent County and state of Delaware, there are many incentives and grants available to help pave the way. With so many people living, working and playing in and around the downtown Dover area, it is a formula for success.”

To date, four commercial properties are participating in the “Unlock the Block” program, all of which are available for lease. “Unlock the Block” organizers continue to recruit other landlords to participate.

- **1 West Lookerman Street:** This landmark building is located at the prominent corner of State and Lookerman streets. The 6,000 square-foot space (sub-dividable) includes a commercial kitchen and bar area.
- **155 S. Bradford Street:** This newly renovated office space on the second floor above 33 West offers five flexible offices suites and a shared conference room.
- **204 Lookerman Street:** The 1,200 square-foot space is on the ground floor of a four-story apartment building next to Bayard Pharmacy, at the corner of Lookerman and South Governors streets. It would be suitable for retail or office space.
- **147 S. Governors Avenue:** This space was formerly occupied by a bakery so it would be ideal for use as a bakery or could be reconfigured for retail or office use.

Applications from prospective tenants will be accepted through July 9. The pitch competition will occur in late July/early August and the winners will be announced by Aug. 15.

To apply for the “Unlock the Block” initiative and information, including updates on properties, related events and project details, visit: www.DowntownDoverPartnership.com